

Step by Step - Section 3

"Abstain from fleshly and worldly desires. If someone strikes your right cheek, turn to him the other also; this practice shall lead to perfection. If one asks you to go for one mile, go with him two instead. If someone takes away your cloak, you should also give him your coat. If someone takes anything of your own, do not ask to have it back for what good can you do with it in the first place?"

In a secular world, or even the world of the modern day Believer, abstaining from fleshly and worldly desires is a tall order.

In a society where a person would almost have to live on a desert island (without films, TV, Internet or cell phones and so on), they would see so much that they, even those who are very religious, would find themselves besieged by sensual subject matter or are encouraged to live in worldly and materialistic ways.

Think of how a monk or a nun lives. They must maintain a conviction to be in the world but not of the world. This conduct is not exclusive to Monastics, however. It is expected of all Believers. Remember at the time of the writing of the Didache there were no Christian Monasteries. This life of abstaining from flesh based desires or materialism was already expected of the early Believers.

What to take from this: I don't have to be a monk or nun or live in a retreat or monastery to abstain from fleshly and worldly desires. I can do this in my own life right now.

Practice: Make a note throughout the day of how many times you are bombarded with imagery, words, ideas, concepts, that incorporate sensuality, greed, materialism, power (striving for power, ambition, dominance etc.) or violence. Start to reduce your contact with these influences, slowly but gradually. Make a point of filtering out these forms of media that bring this into your life (This could be watching different movies, programs, listening to different music, reading different books or newspapers, or simply turning them off.)

If these ideas or images are coming by way of the people in your life, try to keep the topics to more spiritually positive and healthy topics. If the people around you insist on being negative, resolve to spend less time with them, while they are being negative.

"Give to every one that asks of you, and do not ask for anything in return; for the Father wills that to all should be given of our own blessings which are free gifts. Happy is he that gives according to the Mitzvoth; for he is blameless."

We enter a section of the Didache, that has been read over and over throughout the ages and a precious few have ever taken this to heart.

To summarize:

Give to everyone that asks of you.
Do not ask for anything in return.
Give out of the blessings that we have received from God.

Say you are walking down the street, and you see a homeless person sitting next to an empty bottle of wine. Let's say that person asks for some spare change. What is your response? You could make arguments why it is unwise not to give for fear that the individual will just spend the money on more wine.

The Didache doesn't tell us to get lost in self-analysis. The Didache says "Give to everyone that asks and do not ask for anything in return".

We don't control what others do with the money. Nor should we even try. We cannot make wise choices for others. We can only do what God asks us to do, and that is give when others ask.

Needing assurances on how those funds are spent, is wanting something in return and that is not our place to say.

Just give, with no thought of receiving.

We feel that everything we get, we work hard for in some way. But many people in this world work very hard and receive little or nothing, so it is not effort that provides funds or wealth, but God alone. If we have something and another does not, we should not justify our possessions, on the contrary we have only because God wills that we have these possessions at this time. Possessions come and go, and if we are attached to them, they will be a source of burden for us when it is time to leave them behind.

We have because of God, we go through hardship because this is also Gods will.

We are not sitting on top of our own wealth, we are caretakers of what God has given us.

"Woe to him that receives; for if one having need receives, he is blameless; but he that receives without having a genuine need, shall pay the penalty, why he received and for what, and, coming into confinement, he shall be examined concerning the things which he has done, and he shall not escape until he pays back the last penny. But also now concerning this, it has been said, Let your alms sweat in the tight grasp of the palm of your hands, until you know to whom you should give."

The Point? Never ask for what you don't actually need. Don't hold to things you don't use. Our job in life, despite what the secular world wants us to think, is not to acquire wealth, but to do live a simple life in devotion to God. The more you have the more you have to give up one day. The more you have the less you are willing to walk away from that mound of gold. This is why Yeshua said it is easier to pass a rope through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven.

A person is not bad for having wealth, they are accountable for having wealth that they

are not putting to good use. To hoard wealth is repulsive to God and for many this will take a major re-orientation in the way think about life.

What to take away from this: The point of life is not "The one who dies with the most toys, wins". If I have it, use it. If I have something but don't need it, get rid of it (in other words, give to those who are in need).

Practice: Look at your lifestyle. Is everything you have something you use? How much of what you expend is frivolous, just thrown away on meaningless pursuits or on material objects that do little but to gather rust and dust? Begin to go through you possessions, and honestly assess if they are a part of a simple life devoted to God, or are they extraneous? Start to thin out your possessions, starting with those things you have but never use and never think about. (if at all possible, give them to those who do need them). If not, then give them to charity, or sell them (not for a profit but a fair price, or better of greatly lowered price).